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THE TRUTH ABOUT PORT ARTHUR.

BY FREDERIC VILLIERS.

As special artist for *Black and White* and correspondent of the London *Standard* with the Japanese forces in the field during the march on and the taking of Port Arthur, I feel it necessary, as so much has been published in certain journals, both in England and America, to discredit the reports sent home from the correspondents at the front, to tell the plain truth about the Port Arthur massacre. The truth is not always a pleasant thing to tell, especially when it reflects on the conduct of those with whom one has lived in amity and from whom one has received much hospitality.

The American and English correspondents, sharing the vicissitudes of Field Marshal Count Oyama's army corps on the Li-an-tung peninsula, have testified to the humane conduct of the Mikado's forces towards all non-belligerents on their march to Port Arthur. Proclamations were posted on the walls of the officials' houses in all the villages inviting people to remain, assuring them safety and good treatment at the hands of the soldiers and camp followers. Though rather shy at first, the people, finding that these assurances were in good faith, returned to their homes in a few days, and so well were they treated that I have heard repeatedly from the mouths of Chinamen that "the soldiers of the Mikado were sent from heaven," so much astonished were they at the treatment they received from the Japanese in comparison to the conduct of their own troops, who looted, ravaged, and murdered wherever they went.

In the face of their previous good behavior, I think, as a sincere friend of Japan, that the truth should be known about Port Arthur. She would not suffer half as much in the eyes of her European friends if she were to admit frankly the excesses of

her troops and acknowledge her little outburst of barbarism, punish the officers who did not seek to control the men, and shoot a few of the men who were most prominent in the butchery. But no. The Japanese are yet young in the ways of civilization and on occasion can be exceedingly cruel ; but, like most young children, they are very sensitive on being found out, and will tell the most deliberate and unblushing falsehoods to shield themselves.

Take the Kow-Sing tragedy, for instance, and the blood letting at Asan. In the Port Arthur affair their behavior has been exceedingly childlike. They have absolutely denied that any butchery took place after the first day's shooting, in spite of statements to the contrary made by three military *attachés* who were there with the army for the express purpose of reporting the acts of the troops to their respective Governments. The Japanese, by means of their well organized press system and the unfortunate jealousy existing between rival papers in Europe and America, may be able to throw discredit on the reports of the war correspondents, but they surely cannot, for a moment, expect the public to doubt men like Lieutenant O'Brien, of the United States Infantry, Captain Du Boulay, and Colonel Taylor, of England. Though these gentlemen and the correspondents were eye witnesses, the Japanese, in naughty childlike simplicity, calmly say to their European friends : It is not true, but an entire fabrication. If Japan forgets herself, and does that which is beneath her dignity, her true friends should point it out. The Japanese are a fine people, thrifty, frugal, patriotic, and capable of much suffering for the sake of fatherland. Japan is a nation rapidly coming to the front. She has but now startled the world with her wonderful military organization. She is veritably the modern "Light of Asia," whether bearing the flaming torch of war or burning, as a peaceful student, the midnight oil.

The Port Arthur outburst was a childish frenzy and love of killing. There was no apparent reason for the three days' slaughter. There had been easy victories everywhere, small casualties and no opposition in the town. The great 16-fort stronghold of China had fallen after a few hours' struggle. There was some provocation for the first day's work, for when the men of the Second Regiment were ordered, by the direct command of Field Marshal Oyama, to occupy the town, they saw, on

passing over the first bridge, the mutilated heads of their comrades who had been captured in a skirmish with the enemy on November 18. Two or three were hanging by a string passed through their lips to a sapling by the roadside. Further on, attached to the eaves of a house, two more were strung together. The soldiers, presumably maddened by the ghastly sight, lost touch with their officers and commenced shooting every living thing they met in the streets. Captain Du Boulay, Colonel Taylor and Lieutenant O'Brien, with three correspondents, watched this firing from a height overlooking the town, from which every street and alley lay as in a map before them. These gentlemen saw no opposition to the troops, nor were there any shots fired from the houses on Oyama's soldiers. The French military *attaché* with the two French correspondents were with the Field Marshal some distance in the rear.

The unfortunate shopkeepers and citizens, standing at their doors, by virtue of Oyama's pacific proclamations, ready to receive the soldiers with expressions of welcome, were ruthlessly shot down on their very thresholds. On chatting with Col. Taylor, an old Indian campaigner, over the sad affair, we came to the conclusion that it must have been difficult, under the circumstances of the mutilated heads, to keep even the best of disciplined troops from showing temper. What occurred during the three days subsequent to the entry of the town troubled even the minds of the Headquarters Staff. On the third evening of the butchery, Mr. Ariga, a gentleman attached to the Field Marshal as an adviser on international law, and an excellent English scholar, called on the war correspondents at the Yamen, in Port Arthur. We were smoking round a charcoal brasier in the middle of the room. When Mr. Ariga was seated, he turned to me and said: "Mr. Villiers, please speak without any hesitation. Would you call the trouble of the last three days a massacre?" It was a startling question coming from a Japanese official. I looked at my colleagues, Messrs. Creelman, Cowen and Hart, who were also much astonished at the question, and then I answered: "Well, Mr. Ariga, that expression was one that might not quite apply to the case." I told him that the first day's provocation was almost an excuse for the conduct of the troops, but that the last two days' work might carry another term. Luckily, Mr. Ariga did not ask me what that might be, but I had contemplated, and

eventually called it a cold-blooded butchery. It was a cold-blooded butchery.

When Suliman Pasha retired from the Shipka, after weeks of hard fighting, and passed with his fanatical troops through the Bulgarian towns of Eski and Yeni Zagra, every living soul had been slaughtered. I was in these towns shortly after the retreat. The heads of young girls, with gay ribbons still braided in their hair, were the sport of the hungry dogs in the streets. The wells were filled to overflowing with the ghastly victims of the ruthless soldiery. Yet the Turks who committed these deeds, fiends, if you like, were mad with a crushing defeat, and with the knowledge that the Bulgarians, men, women and children, were hand and glove with their enemy, the Russians. But at Port Arthur the citizens, in virtue of Oyama's proclamation, were looking forward to the occupation of the town with equanimity. Shop-keepers were killed in the act of kow-towing. Their stiffened bodies still stooped in death. The smile of welcome yet lingered on their pallid faces. Mr. Hart, of Reuter's Agency, who was captured when the town was taken, was instrumental in allaying the fears of many of the inhabitants, and persuading them to remain in the city, for he had heard of the merciful treatment of unarmed people by the Japanese. But the cutting and carving craze had seized the troops and no mercy was shown. Not only the soldiers, but the armed coolies took a share in the bloody work. These gentlemen were all of the famous Samuri sect and practically the Bashi Bazouks of the army. The order of the Mikado that the Samuri, or two-handed sword men, were not to serve in the army for fear of excesses had been evaded by these gentlemen enlisting as coolies. With every baggage train one met Samuri dressed in the humble garb of the coolie, but with their long katangs slung across their shoulders, carefully swathed in rags to protect the lacquer scabbard and to keep the precious blade free from dust and rust, pretending to assist their lower grade brethren in pushing a cart along. If these gentlemen could not, for the moment, whet their well-tempered steel in the blood of a Chinaman, they would try their ancient blades on the pigs or dogs of the country. It was a piteous sight, in passing through the Manchu villages, to see a number of badly wounded pigs, some with their heads nearly severed, but still with sufficient life within them to

drag themselves along. Any Chinamen seen in the town seemed to be fair game for soldier or coolie.

On the afternoon of the third day I was walking down a deserted street, remarkably free of dead bodies—there were not more than a dozen in patches of twos and threes, here and there—when I came across three soldiers much the worse for saki, the alcoholic drink of Japan. They had just broken a panel of a shop, and had shot the cowering wretch within. The poor creature had probably been hiding, in fear and trembling, for days. The soldiers were reloading their rifles, and before I came to them had broken in the shutter of another store. Through the aperture I saw a Chinese woman at the far end of the shop with her arms outstretched over her two children for protection. Kneeling in front of the soldiers was an old Chinaman, trembling from head to foot, kow-towing. He had heard the death shot, the groan, and the heavy fall of his neighbor, and thought his own time had come. What could I do to prevent this intended murder? A happy thought struck me. I patted one of the soldiers on his back, smiled into his face, said one or two words in Japanese complimentary to the army, and motioned to my mouth and water-bottle, suggesting that he had had a good time. In a moment all three were interested in my actions. They tried to read the insignia I wore on my arm stating my profession. Like children, their attention had been diverted by a new toy; they forgot the shooting for the moment, and eventually I drew them away, laughing and chatting, up the street. As they turned the corner I left them. At all events, the Chinaman and his family were respited till another firing party came along. On the afternoon of the next day I returned to the street. The scene had changed. All the shops were open and billeted with troops. As I passed the store at which this incident had taken place on the previous day, I found the old Chinaman still alive, and waiting on the men. When he caught sight of me his gratitude knew no bounds, he knelt and grovelled, and clutched my legs till I was compelled to shake the old fellow into a standing posture. As I was doing this a soldier stepped from the shop munching a ball of hot rice. On seeing the Chinaman, he broke his ration in two and thrust the other half into the old man's fist. Here was a touch of real good nature worthy of record. A few minutes afterwards I would be

in another street, where a soldier would be carving at a dead body to see if the Celestial possessed a heart or not.

At half-past eight on the morning of the third day Creelman, who had just turned the corner of the house in which we lived, came back and asked me to follow him. On a sand heap not a hundred yards from our door was a poor little baby about two months old. She had just fallen from the arms of her father, who, in trying to escape from the ruthless soldiery, had been wounded in his flight. A few yards off was his body, with a bayonet wound in his neck. His warm blood was still smoking in the frosty air. The band of soldier fiends had now passed on, and were busy shooting old men who were kneeling with their hands behind their backs in front of the Japanese rifles. Several had already bitten the dust. So the bloody drama went on for three whole days after the occupation of Port Arthur, till about thirty-six Chinamen were the only Celestials remaining in the city. These were used in burying their dead comrades and as water-carriers for the troops. Their lives were protected by a slip of white paper stuck in their caps bearing the following inscription in Japanese characters : "This man is not to be killed."

FREDERIC VILLIERS.